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Homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Monday, August 9, 1943

SUBJECT: Drying and Salting Corn. Information from plant chemists and home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

When the Pilgrims came to this country three centuries ago, the friendly Indians taught them how to grow and cook a native plant called maize. This grand all-American food....we now call it corn....deserves our praise all over again this year, because it's easy to preserve.

Of course, almost everyone likes canned corn. But have you thought about drying or salting corn? Both drying and salting are easy and inexpensive, and they don't call for any hard-to-get equipment.

Let's talk about drying first. In drying, or dehydrating, corn, you remove 90 to 95 percent of the natural moisture. How successful you are depends on three things: the dryness of the air....the temperature of the air....and the circulation of the air.

If you have long spells of dry, sunny, rainless weather, you can dry corn in the sun, the way the Indians used to do. Simply spread it on any clean flat surface where the sun and the currents of air can get at it. Stir it three or four times a day, and take it into the house at night and in damp weather. By the way, cheesecloth spread over the corn will protect it from flies.

But sun-drying is much slower than using a heated drier. The heated drier has other advantages too. It goes right on working after the sun goes down, and in rainy weather. Besides, your finished product will have a better flavor and higher food value if you use a heated drier.

Your choice of a drier will depend on what equipment you have on hand. If you have a gas or electric stove, you'll probably want to do oven drying. If your stove burns coal, wood, or kerosene, you'll need a drier that you use on the top of the stove. You can buy some driers commercially, and you can easily make many kinds at home.

No matter how you do the drying, your first step is preparing the corn. Select fresh, tender ears. Steam the cobs 15 minutes...or boil them 8 to 10 minutes...to "set" the milk. Then cut the kernels from the cobs, and spread the kernels evenly on your drying surfaces, in layers not more than a half inch thick.

If you're going to use a heated drier, remember these two points: First, dry small enough loads to make sure the corn is dried evenly and thoroughly. Second, stir the corn and shift the trays periodically, if necessary in your particular type of drier. And watch the clock. If you guess at the time for shifting the trays, you may scorch the corn.

Keep your drier temperature between 130 and 160 degrees Fahrenheit while the corn is drying. The time will depend on how much you dry, and what kind of a drier you use. When you think the corn is done, cool a few kernels and strike them with a hammer. If they are completely dried, they will shatter.

Here's a word of warning: remember that a few damp kernels can spoil a whole batch of dried corn.

Take every precaution to keep moisture out when you store the corn, too. Good containers are air-tight screw top jars, and paraffined cartons or moisture - and vapor-proof bags that you can seal with a warm iron. You'll find small packages are the most satisfactory, because dried foods are best if you use them soon after you open them.

The small packages of dried corn can be stored in covered crocks or large covered lard cans. And of course your storeroom should be dry. It's a good

idea to examine the stored corn occasionally. If you find any signs of moisture, reheat the corn to 150 degrees Fahrenheit and then re-pack it.

To cook dried corn, just cover it with water and let it soak several hours until the kernels plump up. Then simmer it slowly in the soaking water until it's tender. The corn will have a sweet, nutty flavor, and you can use it in any of the ways you'd use canned corn.

Now let's take a look at salting, or brining, corn. Scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the North Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station have worked out a simple way to brine corn at home. You first of all prepare the corn as you do for drying...that is, steam or boil it, and cut it from the cobs. Then you pack it into large containers, and cover it, first with several layers of cheesecloth, and then with a weighted lid which fits loosely inside the container.

The next step is to pour a strong brine into the container, putting in enough to cover the top of the corn to a depth of two or three inches. The brine should always cover the corn completely, so you'll have to add brine from time to time. You'll also have to add salt, to keep the brine strong.

Store your containers of brined corn at 70 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit. The corn will ferment for some time...perhaps several weeks. After the bubbling has stopped, you can repack the corn and the brine into smaller, tightly sealed containers, and store it.

In preparing brined corn for the table, boil it at least 10 minutes before you taste or eat it. You can take out the salty taste by letting the corn stand overnight in water. Allow a gallon of water to each pound of corn. On the other hand, you can make use of the extra salt in the corn when you cook soup. One-fourth pound of brined corn will salt two quarts of soup....just rinse and drain the corn before you use it.

Corn that you dry and salt this summer will give a real boost to your menus next winter. You can get free information on how to build and use food driers, by writing to your state agricultural college, or to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

You can also get a publication which tells you how to dry corn. The name of this publication is "Preservation of Vegetables by Salting and Brining," and you can have it free if you will write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D. C.

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